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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG AND DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [KWMN](#) [SCUL](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: EPISCOPAL PRIEST ARRESTED FOR "KIDNAPPING" MUSLIM
WOMAN

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL/ECONOMIC CHIEF MICHAEL HONIGSTEIN; REAS
ON: 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) The Rev. Elia Kumundan, a priest of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, was arrested in Khartoum on Sunday, May 14, in connection with the disappearance of a Muslim woman who wanted to convert to Christianity. According to the Episcopal Bishop of Khartoum, Rt. Rev. Ezekiel Kondo, the woman is a 23-year old University of Khartoum student who ran away from home in March, after her family beat her for owning a Bible. When the family found her several weeks later at a student hostel, she fled again, eventually finding refuge in the home of a Christian friend. The friend then put her in touch with Kumundan, a priest at All Saints' Episcopal Cathedral.

¶2. (C) The National Security and Intelligence Service (NISS) traced the woman's mobile phone calls and discovered that Kumundan was the last person she called before turning her phone several weeks ago. Police arrested Kumundan on Sunday afternoon, charging him with "kidnapping." After two days, the Dean of the Cathedral and a church lawyer were able to meet with Kumundan at a NISS detention center in Khartoum North late on the evening of Tuesday, May 16. Kumundan reported that he was fine and had not been harmed, but that three other clerics that had been arrested with him -- possibly including a Roman Catholic priest -- had been beaten. The Apostolic Nunciature had no knowledge of the case, however, and officials at the Catholic Archdiocese of Khartoum could not be reached for comment.

¶3. (C) The woman and her friend reported to a Khartoum police station late on May 16, in hopes of persuading the police to release Kumundan and the others. The police told church officials that woman has now been placed in protective custody, though Bishop Kondo is concerned she will be handed over to her family to be beaten again. Converting from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy under Shari'a law, and remains a crime punishable by death in Northern Sudan. However, this crime is very rarely prosecuted, and the last execution for apostasy was over twenty years ago. Beatings by family members and social exile are far more common.

¶4. (C) Bishop Kondo now plans to ask authorities to drop the kidnapping charges and release Kumundan; if police continue to delay, he plans to contact international media and attempt to pressure the Government. (To date, news of the arrests have appeared only in one Khartoum Arabic-language newspaper and the English-language website Sudan Tribune). Although apostasy is a crime, it is not illegal in Northern Sudan for Christians to preach publicly or accept converts from other religions. "Preaching the word of God is part of our faith," Kondo explained. "Whether or not they listen to us is their decision." However, Kondo insisted that Kumundu had not attempted to convert the woman, but rather that she had come

to him. "People who want to convert from Islam bring a lot of problems to the Church, and it can be very hard for them and for us. But many people do it, and we are not afraid of it."

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